

Why in the world would Jesus use these words in first century Jerusalem? There was no stress from congestion and gridlock on toll-ways. The skies were clear and bright- free from pollution. There was nothing to write or to read. Few persons traveled but a short distance from their village during a life-time. They had no steady diet of violence and media trash. They were Dominated by Roman government, but peace reigned, and taxes were far less than those extracted from U. S. citizens by the IRS.

Why did Jesus speak about anxiousness to first century people?...because they worried about everything. They worried about having enough food... and adequate clothing. And those who had adequate clothing worried about how they looked to others. People worried about having a safe place to sleep. They worried about what others thought about them. They worried about the future- about all that might happen to them. And, all of this worries us and every generation.

To them, and to us, Jesus said, don't worry about any of this. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matt. 6:34)

Every moment spent worrying robs us of our joy for living. Present moments are exchanged for preoccupation with past regrets and future fears. Surely none of us would argue for anxiousness as a desirable way to live. Surely few persons would intentionally throw away the present in order to live in the past or expectant future. Nevertheless, worry we do.

As we begin this second full week of the new year, the question to each of you is, how well do you do at living in the present? The challenge is not new to any of you. Yet, knowing

what we know, somehow, the moments get away from us, and we scurry away to past regrets or future fears.

Listen seriously to Jesus' clear teaching...urging us to live in the present. ...to learn from the past, but not dwell there...to plan for the future, but stay centered in the now. Remember: so much life is what happens on the way to what we planned.

What does Jesus want us to learn?... that every moment is precious. Are you aware that we already live in eternity- one breath and one heartbeat at a time. Treasure them fully. Moments spent in past regrets and future worries waste God's gift of life. My experience with persons nearing the end of their lives is that, at that point, the regrets most often expressed were for the things never tried or done, instead of things they wished they hadn't done. Don't you find it to be true that it's hard to appreciate what you have until you don't have it anymore. Jesus taught that now is the time to value the life God has given you. You do not know if you have one day or 20 years of days, but when each day is done, its gone forever. What makes a moment of ultimate importance?...you can't bring it back.

Someone said: there are four things you can never recover:

1. The stone...after the throw.
2. The word...after it's said.
3. The occasion...after it's missed
4. The time...after it's gone.

Starting this new year, work seriously at pushing worry out of your moments.

As important as not worrying: **Be happy!**

Tucked away in my memory bank is a Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy asks Charlie Brown, "Did you ever know anyone who was really happy? Before she can finish the question, Snoopy comes dancing into the next frame. As only Snoopy can, he

dances his merry way across the frames while Lucy and Charlie watch in amazement. In the last frame Lucy finishes her question, “did you ever know anyone who was really happy...and was still in their right mind? Do you feel that way at times?...when conditions and circumstance become harsh , unfriendly and even ugly? When we say we want to be happy, we usually mean we want circumstances to get right.. For example...a happy marriage... a good job ... straight A’s at school... a healthy stock portfolio, etc.

Early Christians didn’t have great circumstances, but they had great joy. Jesus told them that God loved them and that nothing could separate them from that- not even death.

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter five, Jesus teaches us his beatitudes, i.e. “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Are you aware that the word blessed mean, “happy.”...happy are the pure in heart, and so on. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (15:11) As human beings made in God’s image, we are to reflect God’s fierce joy in life. Lewis Smedes put it this way.. “To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.” C. S. Lewis said, ‘joy is the serious business of Heaven.’ William Barclay said, “A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. Joy is the outward expression of the inward knowledge that God has everything under control...that Christ can transform a life- no matter the circumstances. God did not create us to be miserable, but to cherish the privilege of living, loving and giving back to life from the storehouse of all that’s been given to us.

## DON’T WORRY BE HAPPY

I have a feeling that all I’ve said this morning is not new to you.. That you’ve heard it various times. It’s puzzling isn’t it. ...how we can be familiar with, and accept the truth, yet have such

difficulty applying it.

The problem lies in the level of our belief. I experience few people who claim atheism. My experience is that people believe...but that they don't believe deeply enough. We are very busy, stretched thin, impacted by negative realities ...that eat away at our belief in God and his Son, Jesus. The secular world draws us in with its pleasures and distractions, and we lose our spirit.

C. G. Jung, a leading psychoanalyst of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote:

“Of all my patients past middle life, that is, past thirty-five, there is not one whose ultimate problem is not one of a religious attitude. Indeed, in the end every one suffered from having lost that which living religion gives to believers, and none is really cured who has not regained his/her religious attitude.”

As you walk along this new year, center your life in Jesus the Christ. Focus on Jesus even though that are many distractions- pain, hurt, death, meanness, sickness that can steal away your thoughts. Let him guide you toward less worry, and more happiness, and ....Begin today.

Remember that God is the light and life within us.. Shaping us, making us, molding us into the beautiful people He has planned for us to be for the foundation of the world